



# Burning down the Prairie



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## Chapter 1 by Anna Johnson

"That particular morning sky was a yellow shade. Like an unripe husk of corn. A husk not ready to burn."

She smiled remembering the color so defiantly. As she had stood as a young eleven year old girl on the wide acreage of her family's farm, she had gazed straight up. At the time she had told people she was looking for God up there, but now, as a seventy year old woman retelling her life story to a news reporter the wrinkly sage knew it to be a lie.

"When the flames had eaten our barn and started lickin' at the door of our home, my mama took all of us children out to the lawn. My younger brothers started wailing something fierce but I just tipped my head back and looked into that big ol' sky."

The stiff blonde reporter smacked her gum. She nonchalantly gripped her pencil and wrote two words down onto her pad. BIG SKY.

"Then what." She stated rather than asked in between smacks.

"Well, He didn't show. I trusted him, but when I looked up to that prairie sky, he didn't come."

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"Who, Ma'am?"

"My father. He was who I was looking for. You see, when I was five, my father decided to leave our family. He didn't love my mother or my brothers half as much as he had always loved me. And he never did try to hide it either." She chuckled and started her rocker again.

"The night before he left, he woke me way past my bedtime and took me outside in his arms to show me the sky. ' You see this Mattie? This here's what's gonna keep you close to me. If you ever need me, you look up with your big green eyes and you burn a hole in the universe just wishin' for me. And I'll be back with you. ' "

At this point, Mattie, who now went by Matilda in her sophisticated age, stopped to wipe tears from her eyes with her cream blouse sleeve.

"I do believe I've exhausted myself dear, you'll have to excuse me. " She shakily rose using her rocker's arm for support and hobbled into the back of the house.

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